

Jesse Building  
Lawyers' Row Block  
1423-27 Court House Road  
Arlington  
Arlington County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1273

HABS  
VA,  
7-ARL,  
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS AND  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JESSE BUILDING

HABS No. VA-1273

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4-

Location: 1423-27 N. Court House Road, Arlington County, Virginia

Present Owner: Arlington County, Virginia.

Present Use: Demolished in June 1990.

Significance: The Jesse Building was part of the Lawyers' Row complex located on the east side of N. Court House Road opposite the 1960 Arlington County courthouse. The lawyers' (or courthouse) row represents a cultural and architectural heritage that is common to Virginia. Beginning in the eighteenth century, small service buildings such as these, subservient to the larger courthouse, were erected to accommodate lawyers and clerks. The Jesse Building was listed on the county's Inventory of Historic Resources. (See Lawyers' Row Block, HABS VA-1277)

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1927, according to real-estate assessment records; an erroneous building permit on file in the Arlington County Planning Office is dated 3 July 1935.
2. Architect: Frank Upman (1872-1948).
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Jesse Building occupied parts of lots 11 and 12, block 9, the Fort Myer Heights subdivision, as cited in Deed book N4, page 50. Records are located in the Virginia Land Records Office. The following is an incomplete chain of title.

Deed dated 8 December 1972: Herbert Morgan and Joyce W. Morgan conveyed a one-third interest to Mark Morgan. Deed Book 2006, p. 547.

Deed dated 17 June 1982: Herbert W. Morgan, Joyce W. Morgan, and Mark Morgan to Troy Street Associates. Deed Book 2065, p. 296

Deed dated 18 June 1982: Troy Street Associates to County Board, Arlington, Virginia. Deed Book 2065, page 298.

4. Suppliers: Clay roof tile is imprinted "1924, LUDOWICI CELADON CO."
5. Alterations and Additions: The following information was obtained from building-permit files:

No Date [recorded after original building permit]: permit #12010, to build a

second-story addition at the rear of the present structure.

29 December 1950: permit #6650 to build a three-story addition.

21 June 1965: permit #25085 to install fire escape on the rear of the building.

17 December 1952: permit #428 to install a chain-link fence around parking lot.

24 November 1971: permit #3937 to remodel building and install a basement entrance (granted to Drug Center, Arlington County Board)

9 February 1973: permit 14060 to reroof building.

26 October 1976: permit #12513 for "ceiling, light fixtures, bathroom repair, paint, carpet, gutters, kitchen cabinets. Check heating A/C systems, floor tile."

29 September 1986: permit #315 for sprinkler system.

B. Historical Context:

The Jesse Building originally housed the offices of Charles T. Jesse (1879-1960), a founder of the law firm Jesse, Phillips, Kendrick and Gearhart. He was active in local and state politics, serving as Arlington County treasurer from 1932-39. Jesse was first elected a delegate to the Virginia General Assembly in 1920, and subsequently in 1924 and 1926. He also was a strong advocate for the county manager form of government, which took effect in 1932.

The Jesse Building, 1423-27 N. Court House Road, was the oldest of the four most important offices, built in 1927 for Charles T. Jesse (1879-1960), a lawyer who by then had been elected three times to the Virginia General Assembly. He practiced as a principal in a series of firms and served as Arlington County Treasurer from 1932-39. Jesse was first elected a delegate to the General Assembly in 1920, and subsequently in 1924 and 1926. In 1927-28 Jessie and McCarthy is advertised at "Arlington Court House," where the office was staffed by Walter McCarthy (1898-1985), a judge, lawyer, and "notary"; C. Norinne Kloss, a stenographer; and clerks Henry Klings and Frank K. Woolfolk.<sup>1</sup> But Jesse's most significant contribution to the county may have been as an advocate for the county-manager form of government in the 1930s.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Polk's Washington Suburban Directory of Maryland and Virginia Towns Adjacent to the District of Columbia, 1927-28 (R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1927), 634, 638.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Nelson Anderson, "Arlington Adopts the County Manager Form of Government," Arlington History Magazine 1 (October 1958), 53.

Architect Frank Upman (1872-1948), then a partner in Upman and Adams, designed the Jesse Building. Upman also designed Washington's Congress Hotel and Woodward Building, where he had an office at No. 1003. The Woodward (1909) is considered "the most exuberant example of a handful of Spanish Colonial apartments built in D.C." Upman began practicing in Washington in 1902 where he worked for Henry Ives Cobb. As a principal of Harding & Upman he designed several structures in the city; he was a member of the Washington Chapter-American Institute of Architects (1919) and the Allied Architects' Association of Washington. Architect Frederick Tilp worked for Upman & Adams on several projects, including an addition to the courthouse, many schools, and Frank Lyon's "apartments."

Circumstances are unclear, but there was some sort of relationship between the county and the Upman and Percy C. Adams collaborative, which survived from 1917 until Upman's death in 1948.<sup>3</sup> In 1916, for instance--when Upman lived in Arlington's Livingstone Heights--proposals for a new Cherrydale school and auditorium were to be delivered to Upman's D.C. office; by 1930, Adams is credited with designing "practically all the schools in Arlington, Virginia."<sup>4</sup> Upman probably also worked on at least the south courthouse wing addition.<sup>5</sup>

Upman and Adams' simple design for the Jesse Building features twin front entrances with round-arched openings. The main roof and the one projecting over the central bay is covered with tile supplied by a Chicago-based firm; identification was made by its imprint, "1924 LUDOWICI CELADON CO."<sup>6</sup> The only specific ornament was a pair of cast-concrete medallions with a floral motif, and the cast band between the floors where the metal signage letters are anchored. The Jesse Building was the first Lawyers' Row structure to feature indoor bathrooms.<sup>7</sup>

A related Spanish Colonial presence in Arlington is found in the small, stucco cottages built by Brumback Realty in Lyon Village, developed by Frank Lyon (1867-1953) in 1923. Lyon, a lawyer, also helped develop Clarendon, where the Lee Block and a

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<sup>3</sup> Henry and Elsie Withey, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased) (Los Angeles: New Age Publications, 1956), 613; James Goode, Best Addresses (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 114; Arlington County Monitor (20 October 1916). "Frank Upman," AIA membership application, 1919; Frederick Tilp, Alexandria, to Eleanor Lee Templeman, Arlington, 26 December, 1974.

<sup>4</sup> John Clagett Proctor, ed., Washington - Past and Present, vol. 4 (NY: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1930), 404-05; The Monitor (26 May 1916). Adams arrived in D.C. in 1909 and practiced as Averill and Adams until 1914. He worked alone from 1914 until 1917, when he joined Frank Upman to specialize in schools and fine residences.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Tilp letter.

<sup>6</sup> "Ludowici Roofing Tiles: Tile Roofs for Georgian and Colonial Architecture [brochure]" (Chicago: Ludowici-Celadon Co., 1936; "Imperial Spanish Tiles [advertisement]," Journal of the American Institute of Architects (March 1924), xvi.

<sup>7</sup> Phillips, 163.

former filling station exemplify commercial variations on the style.<sup>8</sup> An Interstate Commerce Commission examiner in 1907-12, he traveled extensively throughout the United States. The Spanish mission churches of the Southwest are believed to have inspired him to build Lyonhurst/Missionhurst, ca. 1907-11, his home until 1923.<sup>9</sup> Lyon was one of the original property owners of undeveloped Lawyers' Row land.

The last tenant in the building was Argus House, a residential program of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court for males aged 14-17. Argus House occupied the building from 1971-90.

Charles Jesse also built the Jesse-Hosmer Building--a small structure without architectural significance--at 1419 N. Court House Road (HABS No. VA-1276).

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Two-story Spanish Revival-style commercial building.
2. Condition of the fabric: Very good, prior to demolition.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 5,500 square feet.
2. Foundations: Concrete.
3. Wall construction: The exterior walls are a light-buff running-bond brick laid with gray mortar. The addition features two courses of stretchers at the stringcourse and one course of projecting headers at the water table.
4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing brick.
5. Porches: On the west/front facade there are two concrete porches with three steps. The steps and porches are faced with brick on each end and have simple iron railings.
6. Openings:

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<sup>8</sup> Historic Affairs and Landmark Review Board, Historic Resources in the Clarendon Commercial District (Arlington County, May 1985). The Lee Block, at Washington and Irving streets, was built in 1925. The former filling station, 3200 Wilson Boulevard, was erected in the 1930s by contractor A. J. Porter, who also built the Rucker Building in Clarendon. Both are one-story brick structures with tile-covered roofs.

<sup>9</sup> AnnMarie Fisher, "Lyon Village," typed mss (16 December 1987). Frank Lyon built the roads in Lyon Village, Charles E. Smith named the streets.

- a. Doorways and doors: The two doorways on the west facade feature round-arched openings. The architrave consists of one row of concrete-block crowned with one course of vertical brick stretchers. The door frames are wood. Both doors on the west facade feature one large central glazed panel. A door in the south facade has been replaced with a plywood panel.
- b. Windows: Front/west facade: On the first floor there is a large, central picture window topped by three smaller lights. It has a concrete sill and a lintel made of one course of vertical brick stretchers and it is set in a wood frame. All window frames and muntins are painted tan. The center bay of the second story contains a bank of three two-light, double-hung sash with arched crowns. A one-over-one-light, double-hung sash on the second floor is above each first-floor door. The sills of these windows made of one course of brick headers; lintels are one course of vertical brick stretchers.

Other facades: The windows in the rear addition are double eight-light casements surrounded by stationery glazing, with sills and lintels identical to those on the second floor of the west facade. The window in the second-floor center bay of the east facade acts as a fire escape egress. The window wells at the basement level are brick lined.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Both blocks have flat roofs hidden by a low parapet. A shed roof that projects above the center bay of the west facade above the bank of windows is covered with red tile and is supported by four wood brackets.
- b. Cornice: The cornice detail consists of one wide board painted brown, which follows the line of the parapet.

8. Decorative elements, signage: Cast-concrete medallions with a floral pattern are set in the front/west facade above the second-floor windows on the outer two bays. A cast-concrete band spans the front/west facade above the first-floor window. Metal letters anchored to it reads "Jesse Building." The letters are flanked by two small metal medallions.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Cellar: The cellar consists of one rectangular room below the entry hall at the south end of the building.
- b. First floor: The first floor contains a large reception room at the north

end of the building. A door in the south wall of this room leads to a hall containing the stairs to the second floor, a bathroom, and the door to the cellar stairs. A hall running east-west, originating in the east wall of the reception room, leads to seven rooms used as offices. There are three rooms on each side of the hall, and one room at the east end of the hall.

- c. Second floor: The second floor is reached by a single-turn stair originating in the entry hall of the south end of the building at the first-floor level. The stair terminates in a north-south hall at the end of which is a bathroom that is no longer in use. The room to the west (illuminated by the ribbon windows) is permanently closed off. An east-west hall originating in the north-south hall and terminating in a lounge area divides the second floor into two sections. A communal space is located south of this hall; a doorway providing access from the north-south hall has been filled with plywood panelling and duct work for the heating and cooling system. To the east of the communal area is a bathroom containing showers, toilets, and sinks. The walls are tiled. East of the bathroom are two bedrooms. On the north side of the east-west hall are four bedrooms. The east-west hall terminates in a lounge area.
2. Stairways: The second floor is accessed by a single-turn stair with wood risers. The basement is accessed by a straight-run stair of concrete with a pipe railing. A third stair, which formerly allowed access to the second floor from the first-floor rear block, has been closed off.
3. Flooring: In the original block, both floors are pine covered with carpet; in the addition, they are concrete covered with carpet. The first-floor bathroom features linoleum tile over concrete, while the second-floor bathroom features white ceramic tile.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls: Plastered and painted throughout the original block. The central hall on the second-floor, rear block, features textured paint over plasterboard. The second-floor bathroom features yellow ceramic tiles. Ceilings: Throughout the main block, plastered and painted. With the exception of the central hall, first-floor--which is plastered and painted--all ceilings in the rear block feature dropped acoustical-tile.
5. Doorways and doors: On the first floor, wood panel throughout. Those in the rear block, first-floor, are glazed. Interior doorways in the north-south walls that connect rooms on the second floor are blocked by plywood panels. A doorway from the communal area to the room immediately to the southeast is filled with plasterboard. All doorways feature narrow, ca. 3" flat wood trim painted white.
6. Decorative features: There is considerable evidence that decorative trim was

once used extensively on the first floor, though it has been removed and no pictorial evidence of it exists. In the stair hall at the south end of the first floor, for example, marks in the plaster indicate that chair a rail has been removed.

7. Lighting fixtures: No original lighting fixtures remain. Fluorescent fixtures are used throughout the building, except in the first-floor bathroom and the cellar, which are illuminated with incandescent bulbs in ceramic fixtures.
8. Heating: An oil furnace is located in the cellar.

D. Site:

1. General setting: This building was located on the east side of N. Court House Road across the street from the 1960 Arlington County courthouse. As part of the Lawyers' Row Block, to the north was the Ball Building (HABS VA-1272), and to the south the Jesse-Hosmer Building (HABS VA-1276).
2. Landscaping, enclosures: The only landscaping is a low hedge planted in a brick planter that fronts the west facade at grade level.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

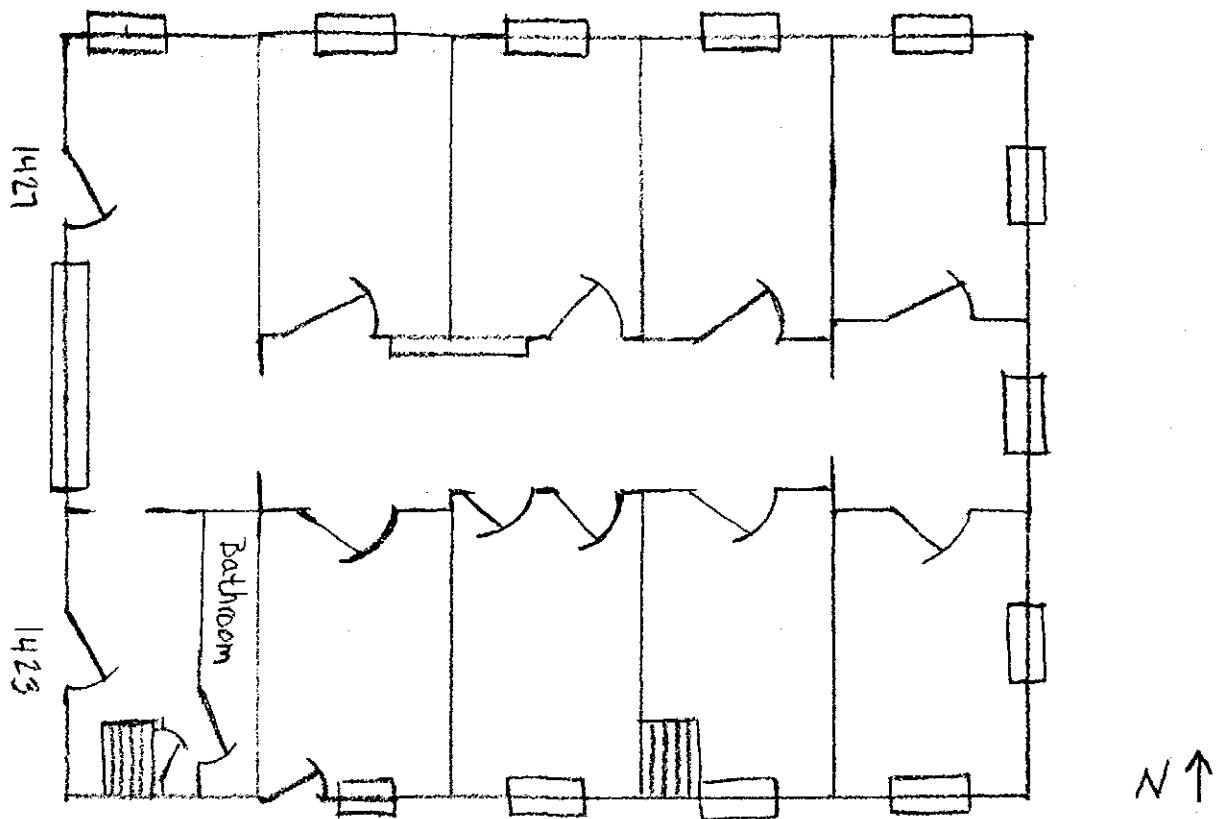
- A. Primary and unpublished sources: For a complete bibliography, see this section of Lawyers' Row Block, HABS No. VA-1277.
- B. Likely Sources Not Yet Consulted: The photographic archives of the Arlington Historical Society may contain old views.

Prepared by:  
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Arlington Heritage Alliance  
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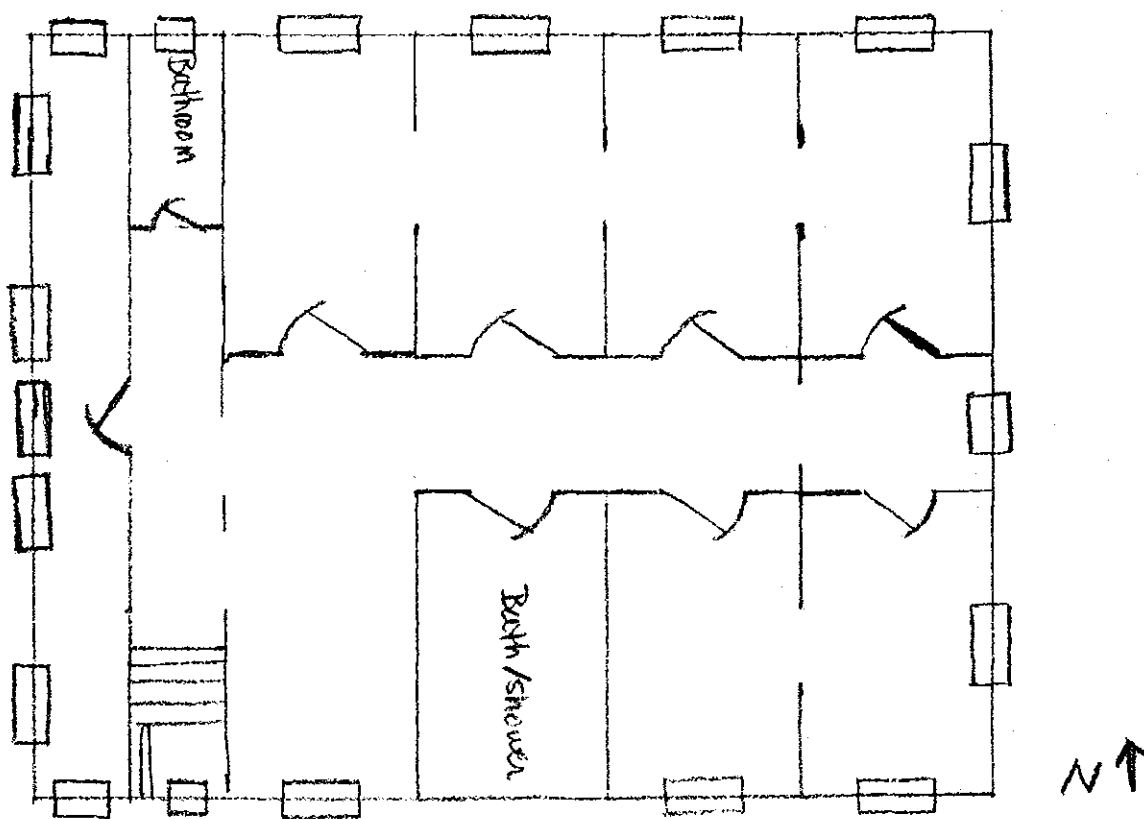
### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation project was coordinated by Sara Amy Leach for the Arlington Heritage Alliance Inc. with the sponsorship of the Bell Atlantic Charitable Foundation, to mitigate the impending loss of these historic Arlington County buildings. Estella Bryans-Munson served as project historian, and John Schwartz was the large-format photographer. All documentation is available from the HABS Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, at the Library of Congress, and the Virginia Room, Arlington County Library.





Sketch plan, first floor. Not drawn to scale. By Bryans-Munson.



Sketch plan, second floor. Not drawn to scale. By Bryans-Munson.